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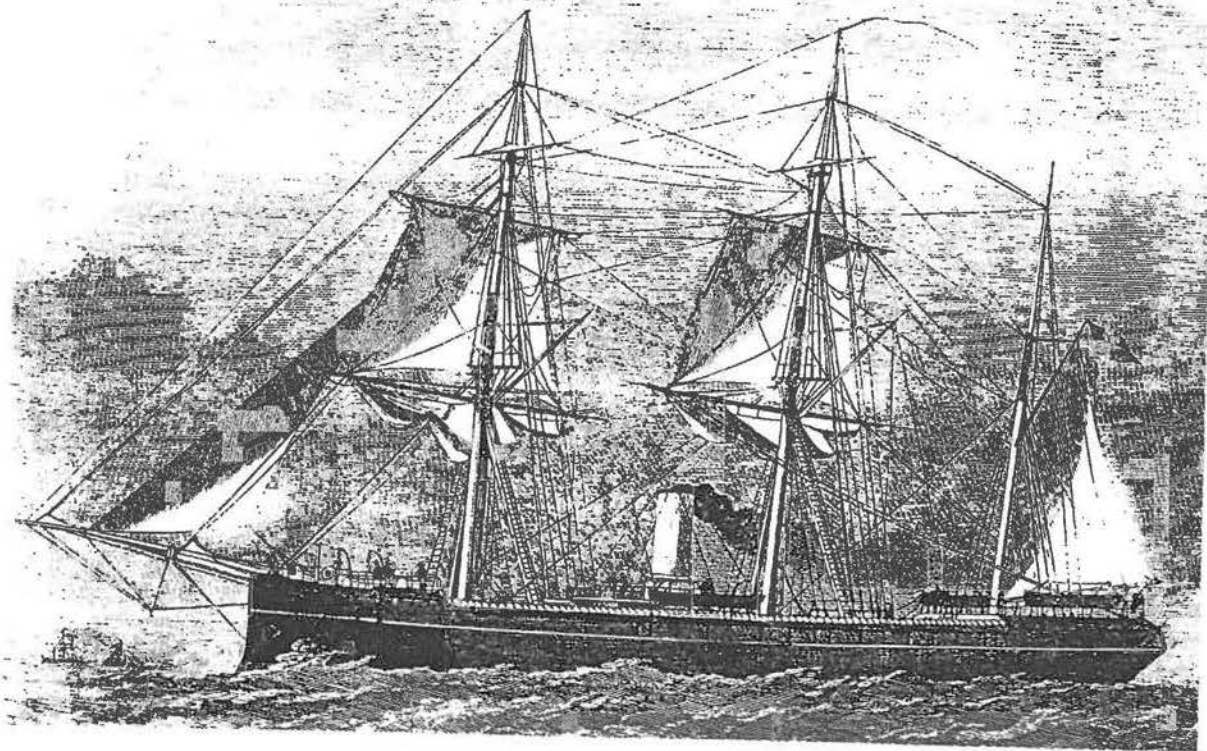
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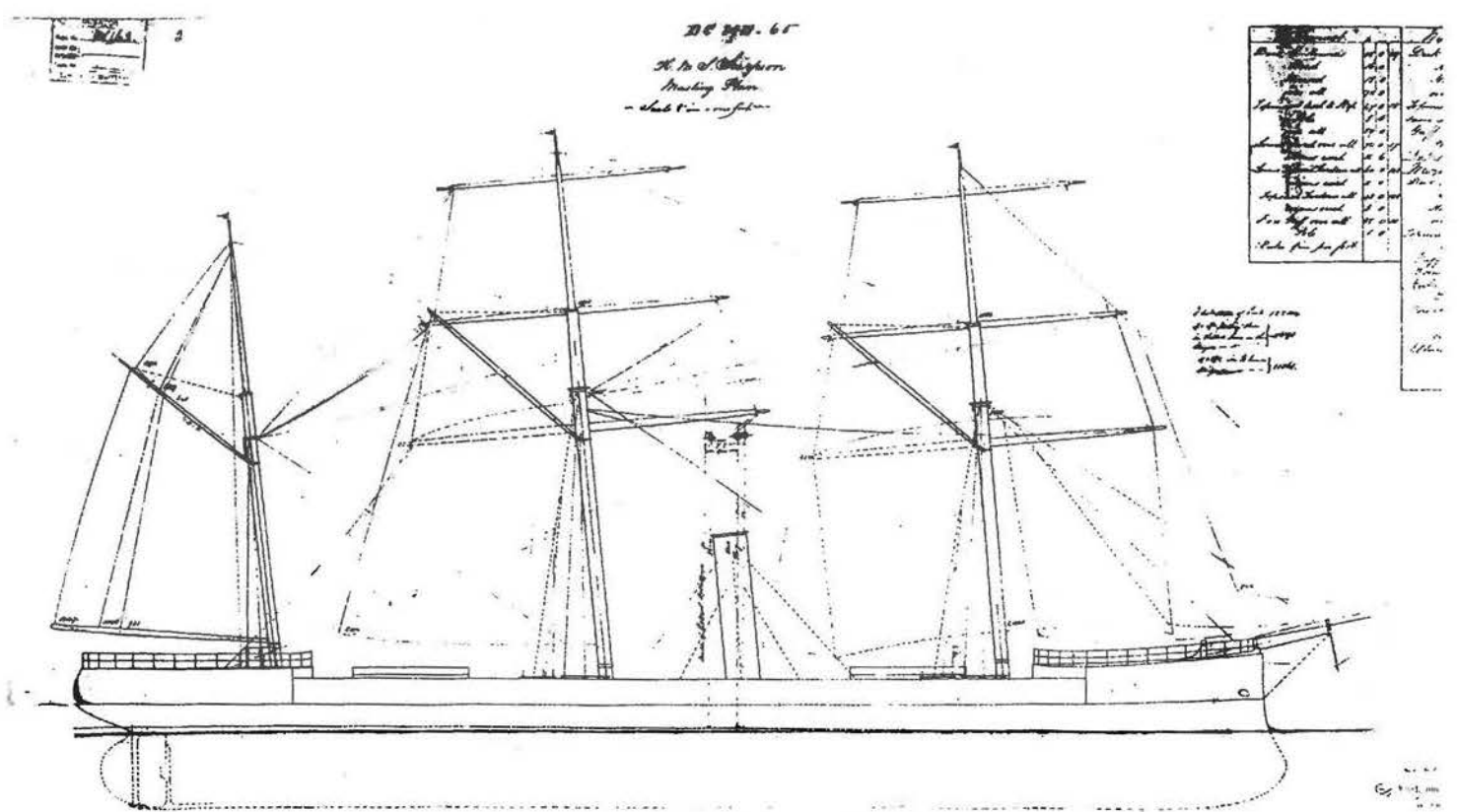
**Charles Francis Adams and the Laird Rams
Crisis of 1863**

By David Martin Bryan

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Benjamin McArthur, Ph.D.
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ONE OF THE LAIRD RAMS



MASTING PLAN FOR H. M. S. SCORPION
This was one of the Laird rams

In March of 1861, as high hopes for a peaceful resolution of the sectional conflict faltered, few Americans anticipated British intervention in Union struggles with the South. Most Americans heard Britain's proclaimed interest in steering clear of the conflict. Congress rarely mentioned England when discussing the conflict. Secretary of State Seward believed the conflict did not concern other nations. Even President Lincoln underestimated English interest, seeming more concerned with solving the Chicago Post Office controversy than with preparing his new Minister to England with pre-travel instructions.¹

But Lincoln had reason to worry. If anyone outside the United States could help secure Southern victory and subsequent independence it was the British. They had what the South needed--a latent rivalry with the commercial North, the best navy in the world, shipyards and technology to manufacture the best war vessels, and the ability to bestow official recognition on the South. Short of granting the latter, however, Britain could not openly aid the South without breaking neutrality laws. Realizing this, on March 16, Confederate President Jefferson Davis sent the first Confederate emissaries to England, their prime diplomatic objective to win official recognition. The Union's primary diplomatic task, conversely, immediately became preventing foreign recognition of the Confederacy.

Unfortunately for the Union, before Lincoln's foreign minister, Charles Francis Adams, even arrived in England, the first step towards Confederate

¹ Duberman, Martin. Charles Francis Adams: 1807-1886. (California: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 256-57. In route to England, Adams stopped in Washington D.C. to receive instructions from the President. When Adams thanked Lincoln for the post, Lincoln responded, "You are not my choice. You are Seward's man." (Referring to Secretary of State W.H. Seward) Lincoln then turned to Seward and began discussing the Chicago Post Office controversy.

recognition took place. On May 13, Britain passed her Declaration of Neutrality, granting belligerent rights to the Confederacy. While this did not recognize the South's independence, it did recognize the South as a separate entity from the North. The North was outraged, sure that official recognition would follow.

When Adams arrived in Liverpool on the evening of the thirteenth, he learned of the Declaration and immediately began his first diplomatic task--preventing this *fait accompli* from becoming the first in a series of moves toward recognizing the South. On May 16, he visited the Queen, announcing his intent to work together with Britain for the good of both countries. Two days later, he met with Lord John Russell, head of the British Foreign Office. The meeting was successful. Although gaining no ground on the neutrality issue, each gained the other's respect. This cordial beginning set the stage for amicability that characterized their relationship throughout the war.²

Southern victory hinged on British maritime aid. Without it, the South's hope of breaking the Northern blockade remained dismal. And without breaking the Northern blockade, foreign recognition and subsequent independence was remote.³ Before England would recognize the Confederacy, the South needed to show its cause to be viable. England would not risk officially siding with the Confederacy without assurance of plausible victory.

² Duberman, pp. 263-64. *Also*, E.D. Adams, Great Britain and the American Civil War. (New York: Russell and Russell., Inc., Vol., 1958), p.81.

Adams's "cool" demeanor mixed with his distinguished reserve was similar to Russell's own temperament. The similarity engendered mutual respect and made Adams a particularly effective personality to deal with Russell.

³On April 19, 1861 Lincoln announced a blockade of Southern ports much to the consternation of both Britain and the Confederacy.

For the first two years of the war, adequate assurance eluded England. Even the untimely *Trent* Affair and the astounding success of British-made, Confederate-bought blockade runners failed to induce official abandonment of Britain's neutral stance.⁴ Too much was at stake, Adams steadily reminded the Palmerston government, for Britain to risk Confederate recognition.

While avoiding official recognition, however, Britain did aid the South through the manufacture of war vessels. British sale to the South of blockade-busters vexed Adams throughout the war. Although not destroying the Northern blockade, superior British vessels weakened it and cost the Union millions of dollars. Confederate success on the seas not only endangered Union victory but boosted British economy and portended possible foreign recognition.

In the fall of 1863, the South hoped acquisition of two specific British vessels, the Laird rams, would turn the tide of battle enough to secure formal British recognition and subsequent intervention. If used, these ships, the most formidable to their day, would ruin the Northern blockade, strengthening Confederate resolve and providing England with impetus to enter the

⁴ The two Confederate emissaries sent to England in March of 1861 were accomplishing little. In response, Jefferson Davis sent two new agents to Europe: James Mason of Virginia and John Slidell of Louisiana. The North believed these men could justifiably be captured. So as Mason and Slidell departed in the British ship, *Trent*, a northern ship stopped the *Trent* and seized the two men. Outrage in England over stopping a neutral vessel led the Union to the brink of foreign war. Also, during the course of the war some nineteen blockade runners reached sea and destroyed over 250 Union vessels.

conflict.⁵ Adams knew the ships could not become part of the southern fleet. They had to stay at port in Britain.

Securing this fate required adroit diplomatic maneuvering. Adams's actions in the resultant Laird rams crisis represent just that. He used the greatest of tact, the harshest of words, and the best of undercover evidence to assure that the two ironclad rams, immensely more powerful than any ship to date, didn't see action against the North. His relentless correspondence and numerous meetings with government officials thwarted the South's best opportunity to use British vessels for the Confederate cause. His success was the acme of his career; the product of a life of quiet learning and active leadership; the climactic act in his distinguished life.

I

"Charles Francis Adams Minister to England" declared a March 19, 1861 headline in the New York Times. President Lincoln's appointment of Adams "is considered here a most admirable one, and there is no doubt his popularity at London will equal that of his distinguished father at the same Court, long ago."⁶ It was fitting that Adams be appointed to represent his country in time of crisis and hostility between the U.S. and Britain. His grandfather, John Adams, had negotiated peace with England in 1783 and traveled to England to represent America. Charles's father, John Quincy Adams, had also negotiated peace with England in 1812 and traveled to England as a representative of the United States.

⁵ Indications to this effect are plentiful in almost any work describing the Laird crisis.

⁶ New York Times, 19 March 1861, p. 1.

On May 1, when Charles disembarked, he left for an England he last visited as a boy in 1817. During his forty-four years between visits, Adams built a distinguished career in Massachusetts as writer, lawyer, and political activist. These substantive years, preparing him for eminent success in foreign diplomacy, began in the shadows of his celebrated ancestors.

Charles had a proud name to uphold. His grandfather was a patriot of the Revolution and the second president of the United States. His father was a longtime U.S. congressman from Massachusetts, and the sixth president of the United States. Both John and John Quincy were commanding, popular, self-confident, and formidable if diminutive political giants. Charles was the opposite. Subdued, unimposing, introverted, he often avoided public attention. But like his father and grandfather, he loved learning, and at age fourteen he entered school at Harvard.

Five years later he began a three year engagement to Abigail Brooks. Their marriage in 1829, was one of three major events in Charles's life that prepared him for diplomatic success in England. He later told his son Brooks he would never have become anything if was not for his wife.⁷ On his tenth anniversary, Charles wrote in his diary, "Perhaps of all my good fortune . . . my marriage was the greatest incident . . . it stimulated me in the right direction and prevented the preponderance of my constitutional shyness and indolence."⁸ Indeed marriage profoundly affected Adams, nurturing a confident demeanor and tenacious spirit.

While now more willing to involve himself in public affairs Adams still seemed affected by the pressure of becoming a "true" Adams. Until 1832, he continued to avoid public life, choosing a calmer and more subdued life

⁷ Duberman, p.35. Based on Charles Francis Adams Diary, May 18, 1850.

⁸ C.F.A. Diary, September 4, 1839. Qtd. in Duberman, p. 430.

writing for publications. In 1832 he entered the periphery of the political scene, attending conventions and writing with stronger political conviction. By 1838, Whigs in Quincy, Massachusetts offered him the nomination to the state legislature. He turned it down, twice. Finally in 1840, after relentless pressure from his friends, he agreed to run, "not because he believed it would contribute to his own happiness at all to enter public life."⁹

Winning easily, he spent five years at the Massachusetts State Legislature gaining the reputation as a leader of the Whig party and an opponent of slavery. This victory and subsequent leadership marked the second great event preparing Adams for action in England. As congressman, he led a strong anti-slavery crusade, including several battles against Texas's admission as a slave state. In June, 1846, four months after his five-year-old son Arthur died, he began editorship of the *Boston Whig*. Soon Adams became head of the Conscience Whigs, a faction of Whigs especially opposed to slavery.

Although Charles established a name for himself in Massachusetts, his father was still the more prominent Adams, returning to the U.S. Congress after one term as president. Somehow, the popularity and influence received by the previous two generations continued to elude Adams. In 1848, a rival political paper, the *Boston Atlas*, described Charles as "a man who lives upon the reputation as well as the wealth of his ancestors."¹⁰ But that year he further carved out his own political niche by helping found the Free Soil party and running for Vice President on a ticket with former president Martin Van Buren. Although they lost to Zachary Taylor, the election marked a turning

⁹ C.F.A. Diary, October 28, 1840. Qtd. in Duberman, p. 69.

¹⁰ *Boston Atlas*, 1848. Qtd. in Duberman, p. 154.

point in Charles's career. It came after the third event that prepared him for political genius in England.

Earlier that year, his father died, carting on Charles the sole responsibility for carrying the family's tradition of public service. While saddened by his father's death, he now stepped out from the shadow of his father's reputation.

The next years of his life moved quickly, snowballing until his appointment as Foreign Minister to England. Between 1850 and 1856 Adams finished a ten volume biography of his grandfather, the Works of John Adams. In 1858 he was elected to the United States Congress. Chairing several committees, including the famous Committee of Thirty-Three which examined the fractured, perilous condition of the country, Adams soon became a respected member. And when Lincoln was elected president two years later, Adams was appointed Foreign Minister in England.¹¹

A different Charles Francis Adams left for England on May 1. Father of five and patriarch of the entire Adams family, he worked now with a confidence, an "admirable self-restraint" and an "instinctive mastery of form."¹² British Minister to Washington Lord Lyons described Adams as "a man of great independence of character, [possessing a] . . . very tenacious" reputation.¹³ Indeed, Adams was prepared to work in England, equipped with intellectual precision, imperturbable judgment, and tactful expression.

¹¹ President Lincoln wanted William L. Dayton to serve as foreign minister to England. Charles Sumner, Massachusetts Senator, also wanted the appointment. At Secretary of State Seward's urging, however, Adams won the appointment.

¹² Qtd. in Adams, J.T. The Adams Family. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1958), p. 196.

¹³ Qtd. in Adams, E.D., Vol. 1, p.63.

II

English attitude toward America was hostile before Adams arrived, reflecting the disappointment over Lincoln's policy statement in his inaugural address on March 4:

I have no purpose, directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.¹⁴

Britain had officially opposed slavery since its 1833 abolition of the institution. For this reason, it had supported the Northern anti-slavery sentiment of earlier years. But with Lincoln's pronouncement, Britain assumed the war was not to be fought over the slavery question. Since slavery was not at stake in America, Britain felt free to view the impending conflict through commercial and capitalist eyes.¹⁵

For England, legitimate concerns arose over the Northern blockade. With Southern ports inaccessible, British economic strength and trading privileges were precarious. England needed safe access to trade with their biggest trading partners.¹⁶ On March 20 Lord Lyons told Seward:

¹⁴ Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861. Qtd. in Adams, E.D., p.50.

¹⁵ Adams, E.D., Vol. 1, p. 50.

¹⁶ British imports from the United States for the years 1854-1861 were 287.3 million British pounds. The next most important trading partner was the British East Indies who exported a distant 126.7 million British pounds to Britain. Of the U.S. exports, the South dominated. Of the 287.3 million British pounds, 200 million were spent on Southern exports, largely cotton, tobacco, and rice. Of all the cotton that landed in Britain in 1860, 85% was from the American South. For greater coverage of British dependence on American goods see the first few chapters of Crook, D.P., The North, the

If the United States [is] determined to stop by force so important a commerce as that of Great Britain with the cotton-growing States, I could not answer for what might happen. . . . It placed Foreign Powers in the dilemma of recognizing the Southern Confederation or of submitting to the interruption of their commerce.¹⁷

The blockade dispute began before Adams arrived in Britain and before anyone in London could pacify growing British opposition to the North. Not surprisingly, then, when Adams arrived there was already a steady departure of steamers from Britain with supplies for the Confederacy. When Adams confronted Lord Russell with evidence of this commerce with the Confederacy, Russell claimed to be unaware of such naval actions. And when he confronted Russell about supplying the South with ships, Russell hid behind the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1819.

Perhaps nothing frustrated Adams more than British manipulation of the Foreign Enlistment Act. The Act was designed to prohibit the manufacture of vessels in British ports for bellicose excursions--especially excursions against friendly powers. Adams constantly reminded Russell of this, pressuring him with threats of U.S. retaliation against England's blatant disregard of its own law.¹⁸

Adams's frustration and England's excuse rested in the wording of the Act. It forbade British subjects from the "equipping, furnishing, fitting out, or

South, and the Powers: 1861-1865. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1974.)

¹⁷ Russell Papers. Qtd. in Adams, E.D., pp. 64-5.

¹⁸ From the moment Adams arrived until the days before he left England seven years later, he tirelessly worked to correct the abuse of British neutrality law.

arming of any ship or vessel, with intent or in order that such ship or vessel shall be employed in the service" of a belligerent power. It also provided punishment of individuals and confiscation of vessels if the Act were disobeyed. It further stated that this punishment and seizure should follow proof of the offense.

Unfortunately, for the Union, nothing in the Act made it illegal to build a warship as one operation, and to purchase munitions to equip that vessel as another operation. If both of these things occurred separately and "happened" to come together, this combination constituted no violation of the law, if joining of the two (warship with munitions) took place outside British waters.

This blatant evasion of the letter of the law was not even questioned by most in England in July 1862. In fact, many considered this technical maneuvering "an exceeding good joke."¹⁹ After all, the majority were sympathizing with the Confederacy and were not even suspicious of war vessels being built with intent for service to the Confederates.

Jefferson Davis's brilliant agent, J.D. Bulloch, operated the Confederate maneuvers in England, working the system to perfection. Even when Thomas Dudley, U.S. consul at Liverpool, equipped Adams with evidence of "furnishing, fitting out, and arming" of ships for the Confederacy and Adams bombarded the Foreign Office with the information, the British government could do nothing. Government officials required proof of illegal activity prior to seizure of vessels and punishment of offending parties. Proof was hard to get prior to an offense. But Adams remained relentless, continually attacking Russell and the British Parliament for neglecting maritime law.

¹⁹ Charles Francis Adams Jr. Charles Francis Adams. (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1900), p. 308.

Despite Adams's protest, the British ironclad *Oreto* left Liverpool March 22, 1862. Leaving with the destination of "Palmero, the Mediterranean, and Jamaica," proof of use against the North was insufficient.²⁰ Three months later, when the *Oreto* docked at Nassau, took on munitions, and prepared for Confederate service, it was too late. Over the next two years, as the *Florida*, it captured thirty-eight ships, costing the Union ten times the *Florida's* own cost.

In July of 1862, another, more formidable ironclad quietly left Liverpool. And despite evidence that the "290" (later named the *Alabama*) was "on the same errand" as previous ships, no one stopped its departure.²¹ During a twenty-two month life on the seas, the *Alabama* captured, destroyed, or ransomed sixty-four Union ships.²²

Throughout the *Alabama's* manufacture, departure, and success on the seas, Adams applied pressure on the British government. He sent for an American ship, the *Tuscarora*, to intercept the "290" if it departed. He instructed Dudley to send evidence of the ships warlike intentions to the Collector of Customs in Liverpool. He employed legal advice from Judge and Queen's Counsel Robert Collier. He began his famous "*Alabama* correspondence" with Russell. Consistently issuing dispatches to the Foreign office attacking its shortcomings and refusal to act justly, Adams tenaciously increased pressure on the Palmerston government. Defending the Foreign Office and calling the accusations unprovable and unfair, Russell refuted the

²⁰ Adams, E.D., p. 118

²¹ Bernard. Neutrality of Great Britain During the American Civil War, p.338-9. Qtd. in Adams, E.D., p. 118.

²² Merli, F.J. Great Britain and the Confederate Navy: 1861-65. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 95. Also see Howarth, Stephen. To Shining Sea: A History of the United States Navy. 1775-1991. (New York: Random House, 1991), p 196.

claims.²³ When the correspondence was published in the London papers, Adams increased his demands, calling for full payment for the ruin the *Alabama* and other commerce-destroyers inflicted on the United States. For every ship the *Alabama* destroyed, the reparation he claimed from the British government increased.

Despite initial refusal to acquiesce, Russell worried when Queen's Counsel Collier sided with Adams and Adams promised increased U.S. response if further rams left port to aid the South. The relentless pressure was working. Although gaining nothing immediate on the *Alabama* question, Adams won leverage for future confrontations.

America was fortunate Adams had this leverage, for Adams now faced the biggest diplomatic crisis of his ministership. Weeks before the *Alabama* departed, instructions reached Captain J.D. Bulloch to arrange a contract for building two more ironclad ships of war. Bulloch was to offer one million dollars cash, up front, and an additional million later on. In July, work on the ships begun.

These rams, contracted with the Lairds' shipyard of Birkenhead, were different from previous rams. Weighing two tons and extending two-hundred forty feet, they were equipped with a forty-two feet beam, and most importantly, a "piercer." Extending seven feet in front of the ship, the "piercer" lay four feet under the water and was deadly to wooden ships. Reaching ten knots under 350 horse power, the Laird rams would be unmatched on the seas.²⁴

²³ Parliamentary Papers, 1863. Qtd. in Adams, E.D., p.119.

²⁴ Melton, Maurice. The Confederate Ironclads. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff Publishers, 1968.), 255.

Acting together, the ships were to break the Northern blockade and secure Confederate recognition. The munitions industry promised that the rams were "so formidable a character" that nothing could prevent their success and efficiency in breaking a Union blockade.²⁵ Realizing this, Confederate Secretary of Navy S.R. Mallory wrote to his consul, John Slidell, on the twenty-seventh of March: "Our early possession of these ships . . . is . . . of such paramount importance to our country that no effort, no sacrifice must be spared to accomplish it."²⁶

The Union Naval Department responded with equal alarm. "You must stop [the Laird rams] at all hazards," Captain Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Union Navy wrote Adams. "We have no defense against them. . . . We have not one [gun] in the whole country fit to fire at [it]. . . . It is a matter of life and death." The burden of stopping the Lairds fell on Charles.²⁷

In March of 1863, Adams confronted Russell, attacking England's negligence in adhering to her neutrality laws. He presented the recently passed U.S. "Privateering Bill," threatening its realization if Britain continued manufacturing vessels for the South.²⁸ Russell, taking the threat seriously, replied that "they [Britain] should do what they could [to prevent illegal outfitting], but the [Enlistment Act] law was difficult to execute and they could not go beyond it."²⁹

Adams left the meeting with hope. But subsequent Parliamentary debate and public applause for a speech by Laird defending his conduct

²⁵ Jenkins, Brian. Britain and the War for the Union. vol. 2. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), p.289.

²⁶ Qtd. in Adams, Jr. , C.F., p.319.

²⁷ Qtd. in Adams, Jr., C.F., p. 321.

²⁸ Duberman, p.302.

²⁹ C.F.A. Diary March 26, 1863. Qtd. in Duberman, p.303.

proved equally discouraging. Even Palmerston defended the government's actions, affirming its lawful observance of the Enlistment Act in the *Alabama* case and in all others. Adams was furious, branding Palmerston a "rancorous hater of America."³⁰ Hopes for preventing the Laird rams from departing now seemed dim. Henry Adams, Charles's son and secretary in England, wrote home. "Any number of *Alabamas* may now be built, equipped, manned and despatched from British ports."³¹

Adams's hopes were further darkened by the outcome in the *Alexandra* affair. On April 5, Russell ordered seizure of the British ram *Alexandra* on the grounds of violating the Enlistment Act. Upon trial of government action in seizing the ship, a verdict indicted the government for illegal seizure. Because the vessel was not armed at departure, no proof that it was a warship existed. For Adams, the implication was ominous. Since the ram should not have been stopped, future rams like it also should not be stopped. Adams knew he needed greater proof of the Lairds' intent or a stronger threat of war with the U.S. if he was to stop the rams departure.

III

Immediately Adams put his "well-knit, far-reaching, effective espionage system" to work.³² The Lairds were just months away from completion and intense pressure had to be put on the government to seize the rams. After the Southern defeats at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, Adams

³⁰ C.F.A. *Diary*, February 28, 1863, Qtd. in Duberman, p. 303.

³¹ Ford, W.C. ed. *A Cycle of Adams Letters: 1861-1865*. vol. 2 (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1920), p. 39. A letter from Henry Adams to Charles Francis Adams, Jr. on June 25, 1863.

³² Melton, p. 259.

confronted the Foreign Office.³³ On July 7, Dudley applied to customs officials to seize the rams because they were being made ready "to cruise against the Government and citizens of the United States."³⁴ Securing further evidence from Dudley, in July Adams again went to Russell with evidence pertaining to the destination of the rams.³⁵ The work for which the vessels were designed was well known to the government. Men, munitions, money, and the two ships were all present at the same port the notorious *Alabama* had left from. Confederate agent J.D. Bulloch was spending significant time at the shipyards, and work on the rams was rapidly nearly completion.

Adams sent further affidavits to Russell on August 14 and September 3. His letter on the third again pointed out that the rams were fitted "for war against the United States."³⁶ Still the government had no proof of the Lairds' intent, Russell insisted in a letter to Adams on the fourth. Adams answered the next day, "I trust I need not express how profound is my regret at the

³³ Gettysburg and Vicksburg had an enormous effect on British attitude toward Confederate recognition. In a letter dated July 24, 1863 to his son, Charles Francis Adams wrote, "It sounds the knell of the confederation scheme. Great has been the disappointment and consternation here! Just at the moment, too, when they were hoping and believing its complete establishment and recognition at hand." As a result of Vicksburg and Gettysburg, Prime Minister Palmerston was much more reticent to recognize the Confederacy.

³⁴ Home Office, 45/7261, Dudley-Edwards, July 7, 1863. Qtd. in Merli, 196.

³⁵ D.P. Crook, p.324; E.D. Adams, vol. 2, p. 144; Duberman, p. 310; and C.F.A. Diary, July 8-11, 1863 confirm this. Other pages from these sources also give support.

³⁶ Charles Francis Adams to Russell, September 3, 1863. Qtd. in Duberman, p. 311.

conclusion to which her Majesty's Government have arrived. . . . It would be superfluous in me to point out to your Lordship that this is war."³⁷

Unknown to Adams, two days earlier, on September 3, Russell had telegraphed his assistant, Austin H. Layard, to detain the rams if they seemed ready to depart.³⁸ In fact for several months Russell had been keeping close watch over the progress of the Lairds and was preparing to stifle their departure.³⁹

For this reason, some scholars suggest that the rams' fate was sealed regardless of Adams's action. Because England realized the Lairds' departure meant war with the North, they were not going to let the rams leave the shipyards--especially after the Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg. Besides, England had more to worry about: the Polish Rebellion, French motives, U.S. strength, Canadian security, and internal division.⁴⁰ Perhaps this is why in January of 1863, Bulloch admitted, "the hope of getting the ships out seems more than doubtful--indeed hopeless."⁴¹

It is undeniable, however, that Adams vociferous objections to the rams' departure influenced English decision. If the September crisis was not as intense as initially perceived, it was only because Adams had, throughout the war, been a constant reminder to Russell of American concern with British interference. Had Britain felt less opposition, the economic advantage of using the Lairds would have dictated British allowance of their departure.

³⁷ Charles Francis Adams to Russell, September 5, 1863. This famous remark is quoted in numerous sources including Merli, Duberman, and Crook.

³⁸ Merli, p.202.

³⁹ Jenkins, p. 289.

⁴⁰ E.D. Adams in Great Britain and the American Civil War and Brian Jenkins, in Britain and the War for the Union provide the best coverage of alternate British concerns.

⁴¹ Qtd. in Adams Jr., p. 324.

But Bulloch was unsure he could get the Laird rams out of British port. Adams's steady pressure had made the Palmerston government cautious and reluctant to see the rams escape. Henry Adams maintained that consistent pressure brought on the Foreign Office was not "unproductive of results."⁴² Historian Brian Jenkins admits the government was leery of another *Alabama* affair and Adams's relentless attacks "could not be overlooked."⁴³ Years later Parliament acknowledged Adams for his services during the tense crisis.⁴⁴ The London Times applauded him for his "wise discretion and cool judgment."⁴⁵ Lord Russell credited him for admirable service to the two countries. Even Seward gave Adams a "very handsome tribute."⁴⁶ Describing his own role, Adams wrote to his son Charles:

All the little I have contributed to this result has been to nourish by a steady and uniform bearing . . . the growth of this opinion [that the U.S. would go to war with Britain if the rams were not permanently detained by] the British Cabinet.⁴⁷

In early October of 1863, Russell sent orders for the government to not only detain the ships, but to seize them. Seizure marked the final failure of the confederacy to change Union control in American waters. Mallory believed the seizure was "a great national misfortune."⁴⁸ Henry Adams called the victory "a second Vicksburg, the . . . crowning stroke of our

⁴² Adams, Jr., Charles Francis, p. HELP.

⁴³ Jenkins, p. 298.

⁴⁴ Duberman, p. 320.

⁴⁵ The Times, February 29, 1868. Qtd. in Duberman, p.330.

⁴⁶ Duberman, p. 331.

⁴⁷ Cycle of Adams Letters. Charles Francis Adams to his son, November 25, 1863.

⁴⁸ Qtd. in Adams, Jr., p. 320

diplomacy."⁴⁹ Historians conclude it was the South's final diplomatic demise, their last chance to gain foreign recognition.⁵⁰

IV

Today, historians cite many reasons why Britain remained officially neutral during the American Civil War.⁵¹ Adams's congenial relationship and constant contact with British leaders remains a paramount reason. For over three years, Adams safeguarded the U.S. from formal British intervention in the war. He engendered a closer British watch over neutrality laws and hindered numerous ships from quick departure for Confederate shores.

In October of 1863, Adams could pause. His tireless diplomacy had triumphed. With the help of Union victories on the battlefield, Adams challenged Palmerston's government and thwarted the last realistic Confederate hope for foreign recognition. Now Lincoln really did have little to worry about concerning British intervention.

Over twenty years later James Russell Lowell, U.S. minister to England from 1877-85, said of Adams:

⁴⁹ A Cycle of Adams Letters. Henry Adams to Charles Francis Adams, Jr., September 16, 1863.

⁵⁰ Numerous sources support this including Merli, Crook, Jenkins, and Adams.

⁵¹ Among many other reasons these are included: Britain was disenchanted with interventionist policies, Parliament was still coping with leadership changes, America (North and South) remained a vital commercial partner, and troubles in Europe demanded their attention.

None of our generals in the field, not Grant himself, did us better or more trying service than he in his forlorn outpost of London.⁵²

Lowell puts it aptly.

⁵²Qtd. in Adams, Jr., p. 345.

Bibliographic Essay

In researching my subject I focused on two major questions: How did Charles Francis Adams influence the outcome of the Laird rams crisis and what were the significant forces that shaped his role in negotiating with the Palmerston government.

While McKee Library on the campus of Southern College was my base of research, the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Library at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville provided me with invaluable sources. For reliable study on the forces shaping Adams, perhaps no source is better than Charles's own diary. Adams's faithful entries provide revealing information and fantastic insight into his character. Two other sources, The Cycle of Adams Letters and Charles Francis Adams, by his son, provide the next best insight into Adams's mind. The best biography on Adams's life is by Martin Duberman. His work is extensively researched and provides a clear look at Adams the man.

For understanding the role Adams played in keeping the Laird rams from leaving for America, I found three books most helpful. Great Britain and the American Civil War, by E.D. Adams, The North, the South, and the Powers, by D.P. Crook, and Britain & the War for the Union, by Brian Jenkins. All three of these are towering works shedding definitive light on the diplomatic crisis.

Other works, the Russell Papers, Parliamentary Papers, Great Britain and the Confederate Navy, by Frank Merli, and The Confederate Ironclads by Maurice Melton were also very helpful supplementary works in beefing up

the argument and shedding light on the diplomatic situation during the Civil War.

The sources I used for this study are by no means exhaustive of the numerous documents and papers on Adams's role in the Laird rams crisis. My study simply wets the appetite for deeper study into this American diplomat.